

2.6. Develop and sustain special events that tie in with local tourism assets

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product development.

Recommended Tactics

TAC, MTOT

- » Support special events through the Special Event Grant Program (SEGP).
- » Facilitate the sharing of success stories and lessons learned among communities, and foster mentoring and collaboration among event organizers.

Regions

- » Support and promote the coordination of special events within and across regions, to avoid scheduling conflicts among events.
- » Facilitate the sharing of success stories and lessons learned among event organizers.

CVBs, Communities, Tribes

- » Develop special events that:
 - tie in well with local and regional tourism assets and reinforce the visitor experience offered by the community and region;
 - take place outside of peak season, to reduce seasonal fluctuation in visitor numbers, to reduce competition faced by the event, and to maximize the available local lodging capacity;
 - have minimal requirements for additional infrastructure;
 - are appropriate for their setting, i.e., natural environment/icons will be protected and respected; and
 - appeal to an audience beyond the local population and can attract out-of-market visitors.
- » Evaluate the capacity of the organization and the community to support the proposed event (e.g., infrastructure needs, available volunteer labor, lodging capacity). If nearby communities will benefit from spill-overs (providing extra capacity for lodging, eating, etc.), recruit contributions from those communities (volunteers, promotion, financial support, etc.).
- » Build strong and broad community support and community participation by actively involving the business community, civic organizations, etc.
- » Maximize the economic benefits to the community:
 - when appropriate, promote visitor spending by locating the event in the downtown or other retail area and ensuring that shops will be open on the day(s) of the event;
 - ensure that ample opportunities for visitor spending at the event are available (souvenir stands, food vendors, related crafts or art, etc.); and

- maximize the local content of spending opportunities for visitors (locally produced foods and souvenirs, available local lodging and dining, local paid performers, local paid staffing, etc.).
- » Identify events of all types – regional and statewide – that could be complementary to the event and coordinate with the event(s) or attraction(s) to bolster mutual success.
- » Adopt a recycling plan for the event to improve visitor and resident satisfaction; e.g., make recycling bins widely available at the event, encourage vendors to use recyclable containers, and have a stated goal of zero waste.
- » Seek out other communities and event organizers that can offer insights and/or mentoring.
- » Implement a survey (e.g., ITRR’s “survey in a box”) or other valid method to gauge event satisfaction and economic impact on the community (e.g. survey local businesses regarding changes in product turnover, additional staffing, increased receipts,).
- » Share success stories and lessons learned.

Businesses & Organizations

- » Support the success of the event, e.g. through extended hours, or event promotion.
- » Help maximize the local economic benefits of the event, e.g. by ensuring adequate inventory and staffing, increasing local products/ingredients, or adjusting hours.

Indicators of Success

- » Events tie in well with other local/regional tourism assets and complement other events in the region and state.
- » Events maximize local content to minimize “leakage” of economic benefits.
- » Events are self-sustaining and sustained over multiple years.
- » Events have broad and sustained community support.
- » The Special Event Grant Program helps establish, reinvigorate, or expand successful, self-sustaining events.
- » Scheduling conflicts among events are minimized.
- » Event surveys indicate visitor satisfaction, nonresident attendance, intent to return, or significant positive economic benefits for the community.
- » Success stories and lessons learned are shared, building an important resource for event organizers.

Background & Rationale

Special events are a recognized means for building tourism. They can generate revenue for local businesses, extend the tourism season, draw new visitors to an area, promote community pride and physical improvement of the community, and help to promote tourism in the area more broadly (O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2010).

Research has found that special events held by the most successful rural tourism destinations consistently tie in with existing local tourism attractions and assets, e.g., fishing tournaments for communities that offer outdoor recreation opportunities for visitors and historical festivals for towns that have many historic sites (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001). In this way, special events complement and reinforce tourism in the community more broadly.

Events generally require several years to become established, making the Special Event Grant Program an important support mechanism.

Event tourism is highly labor intensive and, particularly in smaller communities, requires a great deal of *volunteer* work. Over time, sustaining the volunteer effort can become challenging, as noted by those involved in the highly successful Montana Folk Festival in Butte. Successful events can also overwhelm the capacity of the host community or face opposition from community members who feel overwhelmed by the influx of visitors (O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2010). Building a broad base of community support is, therefore, very important for the sustained success of an event.

Resources

ITRR offers a “Survey in a Box” service for the collection and analysis of *local* survey data. Examples of case studies that have conducted using this service can be found at http://www.itrr.umt.edu/reports_casestudies.html.

The online “events calculator” provided by the South Dakota Department of Tourism provides useful insights into what factors determine the economic impact of special events. It is available at <http://www.sdvisit.com/tools/research/eventscalculator/index.asp>